

TAMC • TRANSPORTATION AGENCY FOR MONTEREY COUNTY

Regional Transportation Planning Agency • Congestion Management Agency • Local Transportation Commission
Monterey County Service Authority for Freeways & Expressways • E-Mail: info@tamcmonterey.org
312 East Alisal Street, Salinas, California 93901-4371 • (831) 755-4812 / 647-7777 / FAX (831) 755-4957

March 22, 2000

Joe C. Tacker
1999 Civil Grand Jury Foreman
Grand Jury
County of Monterey
P.O. Box 414
Salinas, CA 93902

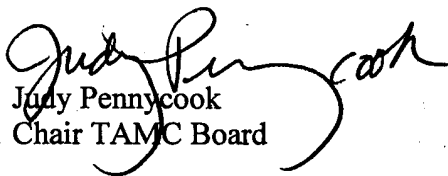
SUBJECT: TAMC RESPONSE TO 1999 GRAND JURY REPORT

Dear Mr. Tacker:

The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) Board approved the attached response to the 1999 Grand Jury Report that identified 10 findings and 3 recommendations regarding transportation issues that required a written response. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Grand Jury process to elicit solutions to transportation problems facing Monterey County.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Acting TAMC Executive Director DeEtta G. Nicely at 831-755-4849.

Sincerely,


Judy Pennycook
Chair TAMC Board

Encl.: Response to Grand Jury 1999 Report Findings and Recommendations

C:\Data\word\TAMC Board\Brd rpts\Grand Jury letter.doc



Printed on recycled paper

TAMC RESPONSE TO 1999 GRAND JURY REPORT

FINDINGS

Finding Number 1:

"With the exception of the general aviation segment, air transport is efficient but isolated to the Monterey Peninsula"

Response to Finding Number 1:

The Regional Airport System Plan was prepared by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) in August 1995. The plan states that there are "public airports serving each major sub-area of the AMBAG Region" and that only one-third of the available airport capacity is expected to be used through the year 2015. The report concludes that no new airports, new runways, or major land acquisitions are expected to occur during that period.

It should be noted that the Salinas Airport has recently completed a runway extension that will allow that airport to serve turbine aircraft. The Master Plan for the Marina Municipal Airport also calls for expansion to allow turbine service, but this has not yet occurred.

Finding Number 2:

"The subsidized Monterey-Salinas Transit bus system is underutilized."

Response to Finding Number 2:

The 1999 Grand Jury Report offers the finding that the MST bus system is underutilized. The factual basis for this finding is not provided in the report.

MST fixed-route buses have over 4 million boardings annually. Ridership continues on an upward trend for both fixed-route bus service and ADA paratransit service for the disabled. Transit usage in Monterey County and elsewhere is affected by these factors: land use; accessibility; funding; service quality; and, service frequency.

The primary factor affecting transit usage is land use. Transit can only be effective in capturing a larger share of local travel when land use patterns are transit- and pedestrian friendly. Sprawl and disjointed land use that encourages the use of private autos are major obstacles that affect access and service quality. The Grand Jury report does not address this major issue of urban sprawl and the resultant imbalance of housing and jobs.

MST has no control over land use and can only make comments and recommendations advocating transit-friendly development. While MST may offer geographic coverage to an area, without safe and convenient bus stops and adequate pedestrian access transit will continue to be underutilized. The cities and county must collaborate with MST in making land use decisions that allow and encourage transit as a viable and convenient alternative to, the auto. This partnering can take the form coordinating general plans, development plans, and specific site plan layouts; integrating transit stops; and developing and implementing parking management strategies and policies.

Concerning funding, MST has limited ability to generate revenues to acquire equipment and facilities and to deliver service. Further, fares are necessarily set to meet or exceed the state-mandated cost recovery ratio. While this results in financial productivity, higher fares are a deterrent to increased ridership.

MST does have control over service quality and service frequency'. As testimony to MST's commitment to continuous improvement, in 1999 MST was recognized with the California Governor's Quality Award. MST is the first transit system in the state to receive this award. In addition, in July 1999 the amount of MST service was increased nearly 20percent. New routes were added and frequency of service improved on many routes. This came about after two years study and public review. The result is a transit network that offers more frequent, more direct, and more reliable service. Ridership is already up nearly 10 percent over last year and continues to rise, even during the traditionally shower months of the year. System productivity of 23 passengers per hour of is running ahead of the 22passengers per hour target after six months. The MST mission is to lead, advocate, and deliver service that encourages maximizes use, improves mobility, and enhances the quality of life in our community. Just like other modes of transportation, there are peak hours of use or major travel corridors when service operates at or above capacity (e.g. Fremont Street, Alisal Street, The WAVE, First Night, etc.) Conversely, just as some streets have fewer cars at off-peak times, the same is true for ridership on bus routes. Further, MST is sensitive to the need to operate "life line" services which may be lightly used, but provide essential basic mobility for those who ride.

The Grand Jury report promotes more traffic generating road improvements without expanding alternative transportation methods (e.g. more transit, adding HOV lanes, car/vanpooling, etc.) New local funding for transportation funding could allow the county to become a "Self-Help" county (via a new taxing structure) and therefore make the county eligible for more state and federal money for both highway and transit projects.

Finding Number 3:

"Since 1995, Monterey County has had a population growth rate of 8.3% compared to the State growth rate of 5.8%. The County growth rate is expected to increase as a result of future plans in Santa Clara County.

Response to Finding Number 3:

Respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding Number 4:

"Funds for the Hatton Canyon Freeway have been redesignated to the planned Prunedale Bypass Project."

Response to Finding Number 4:

The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding Number 5:

"The lack of effective, forward strategic planning has limited improvements in the quality of roadways to meet the ever-expanding needs of residents, visitor, and those traversing the county."

Response To Finding Number 5:

The respondent wholly disagrees with the finding. The limitation to the current level of improvements on roadways is not a result of lack of planning but one of insufficient funding. The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) maintains a twenty-year Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) containing a prioritized list of projects which can be funded from identified sources. The RTP also contains a "wish list" of projects that are needed but for which funding is not expected to come from the current revenue stream. To complicate matters, some funding sources have historically been designated for particular uses under state law thereby limiting the range of projects for which the funds can be designated.

Finding Number 6:

"The Board of Supervisors (BOS) has the ultimate responsibility for improvements in ground transportation in the County."

Response to Finding Number 6:

The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. The BOS is responsible through its County Public Works department for maintaining the streets and roads in the unincorporated area of the county. Caltrans is the owner-operator of the state highway system and is responsible for expansion of the interregional state highway system outside of the urban areas. The cities are responsible for maintaining streets within the incorporated areas. The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) allocates funding (not including subventions which flow directly from the state to the cities and the county) from various federal and state programs to the cities, the county, transit providers and other agencies. TAMC also is responsible for ranking, programming, and allocating funding for state highway projects and other projects and programs from the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The State allocates TAMC about \$8 million per year for this purpose.

Finding Number 7:

"The Transportation Agency for Monterey County has the responsibility for reviewing transportation needs in the County and recommending action to the Board of Supervisors(BOS) and Caltrans."

Response to Finding Number 7:

The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. TAMC is responsible for preparing the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) and recommending to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) that they incorporate the RTIP projects into the STIP. Planning and engineering staff from the County and the incorporated cities within the County, of which TAMC represents, work closely with TAMC staff in identifying and recommending projects for incorporation into the RTIP. In doing this, TAMC must limit the RTIP project amounts to its available allocations.

Finding Number 8:

"Vehicular accidents, injuries and fatalities on Highway I and 68 are equal to or exceed, those on Highway 101 and must be accorded equal attention."

Response to Finding Number 8:

The respondent partially disagrees with the finding. We note that the accident statistics supplied by the CHP to the Grand Jury are in the form of accidents per million vehicles. However, Caltrans and TAMC in analyzing accident data, use data that express accident rates per million vehicle miles traveled. This method is preferred by TAMC as it divides the number of accidents per million vehicles by the length of roadway traveled thereby normalizing the data. This allows an "apples to apples" comparison of roadway segments on a "mile to mile" basis. The format in which the accident data is expressed can significantly change the accident ranking depending upon roadway length and daily traffic volume. In addition, TAMC evaluates other factors when analyzing a route such as congestion, level of service, and the future traffic conditions (forecasts). The Route IO 1 Freeway project has been under development since the late 1980s, during which time it remained the TAMC number one underfunded project. In 1998 a combination of federal, state Interregional, and TAMC Regional funds were accumulated, in a partnership with Caltrans and the project was placed on the STIP by the CTC. The project is currently estimated at a cost of \$245 million. Less than half of these funds are controlled by TAMC. If the project were eliminated or scaled down, Monterey County could potentially lose matching funds for this project approximating \$145 million that could be diverted by the State to other counties.

Finding Number 9:

"The Regional CALTRANS office in San Luis Obispo has supplied information on planned highway construction on the main highway arterials of Highways 1, 68, and 101(Exhibit B)."

Response to Finding Number 9:

The respondent agrees with the finding.

Finding Number 10:

"The corridors between Salinas and the Monterey Peninsula, and Highways 101, 1 and 68 need extensive upgrading."

Response to Finding Number 10:

The respondent agrees with the finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation Number 1:

"The Board of Supervisors (BOS) require that a cost benefit analysis be completed on Highways 101, 1, and 68 prior to establishing priorities for the upgrade of each."

Response to Recommendation Number 1:

The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future. It is important to note that TAMC is the responsible agency for preparation of the RTIP every two years, rather than the BOS. This recommendation will be implemented by TAMC in accordance with the STIP Guidelines adopted by the CTC in September 1999 requiring that in the 2002 STIP cycle that each RTIP submitted to the CTC will be accompanied by a report on its performance and cost-effectiveness. The result is an effective cost-benefit analysis of recommended on projects on the local and state highway system within the county.

Recommendation Number 2:

"The Board of Supervisors (BOS) pursue Federal and State grants to upgrade highways and roads."

Response to Recommendation Number 2:

The recommendation has been implemented. It is important to note that the Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC), the County, and the cities within the County have been jointly and separately pursuing grant funding for highways and roads within the county area.

TAMC annually pursues federal and state grants for transportation. TAMC also assists the cities and the County with their grant applications. As an example of regional effort, TAMC was successful in obtaining over \$15 million in federal demonstration and high priority federal grants for the Route 101 Prunedale Freeway. As an example of local effort, the County of Monterey has obtained approximately \$36 million dollars in grant financing for seismic rehabilitation of 21 bridges and reconstruction of six bridges under federal highway bridge rehabilitation and replacement and state seismic programs.

TAMC and the local agencies will continue to be aggressive in pursuit of Federal and State grants in the future. TAMC also administers about \$6 million per year in federal transportation dollars that are distributed to local agencies in Monterey County from a number of federal programs. It should be noted that Congress has different modal priorities in different years, changing focus from program areas such as transit and Transportation Demand Management, to rehabilitation, to regional capacity improvements. TAMC and the local agencies must accordingly change their grant application tactics to meet the evolving funding criteria.

Recommendation Number 3:

"The Board of Supervisors (BOS) issue bonds to finance highway and road improvements."

Response to Recommendation Number 3:

This recommendation requires further project specific analysis before it is deemed an appropriate mechanism for cost effectively financing highway improvements. In order for an agency to issue transportation bonds, it must have a dedicated revenue stream with which to repay them. General obligation transportation bonds resulting from a local mandate or initiative must be passed by a two-thirds majority vote. In the past ten years, Monterey County voters represented their support of two 1/2 cent sales tax initiatives for transportation by a simple (>50%) majority. However, the measures could not be passed and implemented, as state law requires a 2/3 super-majority vote of the general electorate for approval.

Bonding for transportation projects as a financing mechanism must be carefully evaluated as bonding can result in up to 50% project cost increases by the time the bond debt is retired. Bonding, if approved by the voter, can be advantageous for some short-term projects such as pavement rehabilitation because facilities lost through lack of maintenance can cost up to three to five times more to rebuild. Major long-term projects are often suited more to "pay as you go" because of the long period of time it takes to get the project ready for construction. In any case, general obligation bonds require a super-majority approval of the general electorate and a commitment of a dedicated revenue stream for debt service retirement.

TAMC is currently supporting the implementation of Senate Constitutional Amendment 3(SCA 3). SCA 3 would allow a one time statewide vote for a 1/2 cent sales tax for transportation to pass by a simple majority. Approval of a 1/2 cent sales tax in Monterey County would generate \$600 million over the 20-year life of the tax. In order for the tax to take effect in Monterey County, all of the following actions are required:

1. SCA 3 must be passed by 2/3 majority of both houses of the state legislature (the governor's signature would not be needed in this case.)
2. The 1/2 cent sales tax must be passed by a simple majority of the California voters.
3. The 1/2 cent sales tax must also be approved by a simple majority of the voters in Monterey County.

In anticipation of approval of this important constitutional amendment, TAMC has begun preparation of an expenditure plan for the measure, which must be approved by the cities and the County. The expenditure plan will identify regional transportation improvements and dedicated pavement rehabilitation expenditures identified by the cities and the County. In the event that SCA 3 is passed and is successful in Monterey County, the sales tax revenue stream would be available for either bonding or pay as you go financing of transportation improvements.